



Kate James

Rides a white horse: fear in the work of Kate James

In the history of scientific research it is a little known fact that the pioneer of human attachment theory, John Bowlby, a man whose work continues to be influential today, drew heavily in his psychiatric endeavours on his work as an animal behaviourist. Bowlby saw in the bonding and socialising patterns of primates a template in which humans too might be included. For Kate James however, an artist in whose work the nature of attachment is paramount, the bonded experience is not, as some might have it, limited by species alone. Like so many amongst us, her deep love of animals, her pets in particular, are a source of both delight and inspiration. But where her animals are loved ones, they are also cause for concern; for where there is attachment and tenderness, separation must surely follow.

In a bid to mediate what James confesses to be a dread fear, her practice as artist and maker is both driven by and fraught with emotion. Seeing her work as an agency of catharsis she has taken to weaving the hair of both dog and horse into her sculptural creations. Painstakingly crafted, these memento mori for deaths which are yet to occur, pay testament to an acute and anxious bond. Consider for instance her photographic series 'What a good girl you are', 2005 in which an otherwise invisible attachment is reified into being; or 'Transference', 2009-10 where an umbilicus unites two previously autonomous objects: one a vessel, the other a diminutive glass funnel.

Curiously these products of fractious longing are nuanced too by other shades of ardour. Possessed of an erotic simulacra they might easily be confused for objects of fetish delight. Hair, that universal node of erotica is everywhere apparent. Funnels sprout them, blankets bind them, whip handles extrude them en-mass: sturdy implements ambiguously poised between human, animal and tool.

For the artist however they are nothing if not sites of dread and worry. Like the psyche itself, each piece acts as a container from which feelings spill and desires are apt to leak; in this they dance the tightrope of an otherwise conflicted undertaking, between desirous Dionysian unboundedness and declarative Apollonian restraint. I like these works, for their beauty which is refined, for their execution which is meticulous and their language both layered and personal. And where their source is cosy domestic menagerie, their impetus is something else entirely: nature in dark, chthonian guise.

Kate James is an artist who employs a tradition that is almost on the verge of extinction. Most of the tools which her practice requires she has manufactured by herself, the materials sourced as best she can. Like psychoanalysis in its earliest inception, her project is archaeological in nature. But as much as it unearths, her work is an act of transformation, taking that which might prove her undoing and with it making the artefacts that distinguish her oeuvre.

Damian Smith, 2010



The Nodal Point, 2007-2008, horsehair



Fear Itself (detail), 2008, horsehair and found object



LIST OF WORKS

Letting Go

Maroondah Art Gallery

The World is a Dangerous Place, 2004
Pegasus print and wool

Lesson to be Learnt, 2007-ongoing
wool, tapestry cloth and frames, chair
and table

Sweet Jane, 2009
horsehair and glass dome

Transference, 2009-10
horsehair, funnel, bell jar and coal

Fear Itself, 2008
horsehair and found object

Letting Go, 2007
inkjet on Somerset paper

Whirling, 2009
video

What a Good Girl You Are, 2005
Pegasus print and wool

Security Blanket, 2006
dog hair

The Work of Worry is Never Done

Craft Victoria

The Nodal Point, 2007-08
horsehair

Windsuck, 2006
video

The Work of Worry is Never Done, 2006
horsehair

Pony Tales, 2009-10
horsehair

Front: *Transference*, 2009-2010, horsehair, funnel, bell jar and coal

Back: *Pony Tales* (detail), 2009-10, horsehair



This catalogue has been produced to coincide with the exhibitions

Letting Go

Maroondah Art Gallery

4 March-10 April, 2010

The Work of Worry is Never Done

Craft Victoria

11 March-24 April, 2010

 **maroondah**artgallery

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